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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: THE UNDERBELLY OF SUCCESS: ST. KITTS' KID CRISIS

11. (U) Summary: Recent newspaper stories in St. Kitts and Nevis have highlighted the plight of child abuse in that country. The operator of a government-subsidized Children's Home has complained of threats against the home's female occupants and a recent incident in which a Cuban diplomat is alleged to have struck a Kittitian child have put a spotlight on a usually taboo subject in this otherwise flourishing twin-island federation. End Summary.

ABUSE IN THE NEWS...

12. (U) A spate of recent newspaper headlines in St. Kitts and Nevis covering a rash of child-abuse incidents has raised the profile of a subject not frequently talked about in the country. In the most sensational of these cases, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs intervened in a case in which an unnamed official from the Cuban Embassy to St. Kitts and Nevis is accused of slapping an 8-year old Kittitian boy on October 26 when the boy was playing with the diplomat's daughter. According to the Sun St.Kitts/Nevis newspaper, the diplomat was detained and taken to the Basseterre Police Station, but was not/not arrested since he has diplomatic immunity. The incident made headlines for several days, and the child's father, St. Clair Williams, has stated he plans to sue the Cuban official. Neither the Cuban nor the St. Kitts/Nevis government has explained what action will be taken against the Cuban official in question.

13. (SBU) Concurrently, other stories involving child abuse have hit the headlines of St. Kitts/Nevis newspapers. In early November the Sun reported that local teenagers had cut holes in the Children's Home's fence and attempted to accost and molest the young children who live there. In addition, PolOff met with Robert Hull, director of the St. Christopher Children's Home, accompanied by St. Kitts/Nevis Associate Peace Corps Director Mavis Huggins. According to Hull, the home was opened some time in the early 1900's by a private organization, but was eventually taken over by the (then-colonial) government. Hull confirmed the newspaper reports and claimed that even since publication, there has still been no police presence in the area. Hull noted that the Home is mostly funded by the GOSKN, which provides \$30,000 USD of the Home's yearly budget of \$43,000. The remaining \$13,000 USD is provied by private donors.

14. (U) The Home currently houses 12 children, varying in age from three to eventeen, including five girls. Hull claims theHome an accommodate 30 children, though the buildng is

clearly old and lacks air conditioning. All of the children are placed in the Home by court order, at the recommendation of the Social Welfare Department. Hull stated that most of the children have been physically or sexually abused, but admitted that they have little to no means to provide any counseling for the children. Mr. Hull noted occasional USG assistance to the Home, in the form of a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) and a U.S. Navy vessel that once visited port and came by to paint the entire Home. Ms. Huggins expressed her interest in having a PCV return to work at the Home.

...AND IN THE COURTS

15. (SBU) Besides these two incidents, other child abuse stories have dominated the news. On November 23rd the Leewards Times mistakenly reported on its front page that a police officer was awaiting a verdict in his trial on incest with his 12-year old daughter. After local law enforcement leaders appeared on television condemning the mistake, the paper issued a retraction, clarifying that the accused is a former Nevis police officer.

16. (SBU) In a separate incident, a 12-year old boy was convicted of "house breaking and larceny" for stealing a .38 semi-automatic pistol and was sentenced to 10 lashes, in addition to a curfew and mandatory counseling sessions. In contrast to the outrage sparked by the slapping incident involving a Cuban official, this case has caused no uproar, and indicates that Kittitians are still generally tolerant of corporal punishment. According to a reporter at the Sun St. Kitts/Nevis, such "strokes" delivered as punishment are less common than a few years ago, but are still used by the GOSKN

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as form of punishment for juveniles.

LACK OF SOCIAL SERVICES INFRASTRUCTURE

17. (SBU) While the St. Kitts/Nevis courts have heard seven child abuse cases this year, public sector resources for child abuse victims are not abundant. In addition to the St. Christopher's Children's home, another NGO named "Save Our Sons" or "SOS" has attempted to help abused and at-risk boys develop in a safe environment. The NGO originally received government subsidies, but is now run entirely with private funds, mostly provided by the founder Clive Saunders, who is also a High School guidance counselor. SOS currently houses five boys, and a PCV currently provides tutoring once a week.

18. (U) Another NGO focused on ending domestic violence, Men Underpinning St. Kitts (MUSK), recently held a domestic violence symposium for the police force, social services, nurses, and the Ministry of Gender Affairs, and is starting a working group for these members to brainstorm on ways to fight widespread domestic violence in St. Kitts/Nevis. The government's Ministry of Gender Affairs (in conjunction with the Peace Corps) is active in raising awareness for domestic violence, but has few resources to provide counseling, and there is only one child psychiatrist in the country, who is reportedly overworked.

COMMENT

19. (SBU) The child abuse situation in St. Kitts and Nevis is not unique among the seven nations of the Eastern Caribbean. As St. Kitts and Nevis continues to enjoy success in economic development, it remains to be seen whether it will similarly develop the socio-political will to tackle the endemic, if most often invisible, problem of child abuse. Unfortunately, if the experience of other Caribbean nations is any indicator, it is unlikely that economic growth will lead to new sensitivities in the near term. End Comment.

HOWARD